DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 131 446 CS 003 047

TITLE	Organizing and Managing a Reading Program. A Position Paper.
INSTITUTION	New England Consortium for the Right to Read, Kingston, R.I.
PUB DATE	Sep 76
NOTE	16p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Elementary Secondary Education; *Program Administration; Program Design; *Program Development; Program Evaluation; *Program Planning; Reading; *Reading Instruction; *Reading Programs
IDENTIFIERS	New England Consortium; *Right to Read

ABSTRACT

The New England Consortium criteria of excellence are 26 statements of conditions which describe a quality reading program and which must exist if all children are to learn to read. These statements are grouped under five goal areas, the second of which, organizing and managing a reading program, is treated in this position paper. The paper supports attainment of the following criteria for this goal area: there is articulation and coordination of the reading program throughout school system administrative units; a continuous progress organization of the reading program is in operation; classroom and school organizational patterns meet all needs of the school population; components of the language arts program support other program components; the reading program recognizes and accommodates the needs of subpopulations; all content area teachers teach the skills necessary for the effective reading of their instructional materials; program evaluation provides data necessary for describing achievement and measuring progress; the reporting system interprets a child's reading progress for parents; and the school system provides an education program for parents and reading instruction for adults. (JM)

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ED131446

Organizing and Managing a Reading Program

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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A Position Paper of

THE NEW ENGLAND CONSORTIUM
FOR THE RIGHT TO READ

September 1976

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CS003 043

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Contract Arrangements

The Curriculum Research and Development Center, Department of Education, University of Rhode Island holds the contract for this project. Fiscal management is under the direction of Dr. Theodore M. Kellogg. Dr. Marion L. McGuire is the coordinator of operations.

Introduction

The New England Consortium Criteria of Excellence are twenty-six statements of conditions that describe a quality reading program. These conditions must exist if all children are to learn to read. The relative quality of a program may be judged by determining the degree to which the program meets these standards.

The statements are grouped under five goal areas, as shown below:

New England Consortium Criteria of Excellence
Goal Areas

A. Community and School Climate
*B. Organizing and Managing a Reading Program
C. Staffing a Reading Program
D. Selecting and Utilizing Materials
E. Fostering Reading Interests

The position taken in this paper supports attainment of the criteria in Goal Area B: Organizing and Managing a Reading Program, as listed below:

1. There is articulation and coordination of the reading program throughout all the administrative units of the school system.
2. A continuous progress organization of the reading program is in operation.
3. The organizational patterns within classrooms and in the school as a whole meet the needs of all segments of the school population.
4. The language arts program is integrated, each component supporting all other components.
5. The reading program recognizes and accommodates the needs of sub-populations.
6. All content area teachers are teaching those skills necessary to the effective reading of their own instructional materials.
7. The evaluation component of the reading program provides the data necessary for describing the current status of achievement in reading and measuring progress.
8. The reporting system is designed to interpret a child's reading progress to his parents.

9. The school system has a program of education for parents (or other adults responsible for children) with special emphasis on parents of preschoolers.
10. The school system provides reading instruction for adults.

This position paper is provided to assist school personnel in developing a rationale for and in planning programs and activities that meet these criteria.

A reading program is much more than a list of skills and/or the materials and guides for teaching them. The position taken in this paper is that *a quality reading program has a well developed plan for its organization and management.*

It will have the following characteristics:

1. Its focus will be on the identified needs of individual students.
2. It will be articulated within itself both vertically and horizontally and integrated with other aspects of language arts instruction.
3. It will make use of organizational patterns within classrooms, schools, and the school system which are locally appropriate and compatible.
4. Its effectiveness will be judged against criteria which measure not only whether students possess the skills but also whether they use these skills as needed and whether they read independently.
5. Accountability for such a reading program is a shared responsibility.

An individualized program

The fact that there are differences among students in their innate potential, their learning rates, their learning styles, their interests and goals is a given. These differences exist at all levels. Children entering kindergarten differ significantly from each other. They are at various stages of maturation physiologically, emotionally, and socially. Some will be ready to begin formal reading instruction toward the end of the kindergarten year. Others will enter first grade not yet ready to begin. As they progress through school, these individual differences will increase substantially. In a seventh grade classroom, for example, there will be a few students who are still unable to deal with materials on a primary grade level of difficulty while others will read and understand materials written for senior high school students.

As teachers strive to accommodate these differences, they quickly discover that individualizing instruction does not lead to homogeneity in students' reading ability. Secondary teachers often feel that if elementary teachers had done their job of meeting individual students' needs, these students should all be able to read at least on a seventh grade level by the time they get to junior high school. This is far from the truth. A well-organized and managed reading program at any level creates the need for still greater individualization at the next level. This happens because students' rates of growth vary greatly. While the slowest children are making minimal progress, the fastest have spurted far ahead.

The primary responsibility of an individualized program is clearly to place each student at that point in an organized sequence where he needs to be to facilitate his continuous progress toward mastery of the skills and attitudes necessary for him to learn to read to the limits of his potential. *Not only must he be placed at the appropriate level initially; but his placement must be monitored and adjusted as he progresses at his own personal rate through the program.* Learning a skill is a spiral process. Mastery at one level will be insufficient at a later level. Since skills must be taught and continually retaught at increasing levels of complexity, students must be continually monitored through this spiral process.

Individual differences exists, also, in attitudes and appreciation. The ultimate goal of teaching children to read is to help them to acquire a love and appreciation of reading and the ability to use it to enhance their development as human beings. To achieve this goal, mastery of the skills is an essential. Children who experience difficulty with the skills will probably avoid reading. But skill mastery is only the beginning. Individual differences in interests and goals must also be discovered, accommodated, and fostered. Students must receive the instruction and motivation they need at any given point in time and in the form most appropriate for them as individuals.

An articulated and integrated program

Vertical articulation relates to the way in which a reading program for individual students or groups of students is coordinated over the entire time during which reading is taught. Gaps in this vertical sequence have tended to occur at certain spots in the continuum, very often the following transition points in a traditionally graded system: kindergarten to first grade, third grade to fourth grade, elementary school to middle or junior high school, junior high to senior high, and, more recently, senior high to post secondary institutions

Horizontal articulation relates to the instruction students are receiving from all sources in any one phase of their development. It is concerned with getting everything together at a specific point in time rather than over a period of time as in vertical articulation. For example, how well are remedial programs related to work being done with the same students in the regular classrooms? the special help offered in Title I programs to handicapped children with other instruction being given to the same children concurrently? the work in secondary developmental reading classes to instruction in content classes? And, for that matter, what about the relationship of summer programs to those of preceeding and following years?

Why are both vertical and horizontal articulation so important? Child

development studies indicate clearly that both the vertical sequence and the horizontal interrelationships of all aspects of children's growth are bound together inextricably. This fact provides part of the answer.

Another reason relates to the nature of reading instruction itself. Skills must be taught spirally. Instruction in almost all of the skills begins in kindergarten or first grade and is continued throughout the school experience. The difference between skills teaching to eight year olds and to thirteen year olds, for example, is not in the skills which are taught but rather in the level of sophistication of the skills and of the materials to which students are required to apply the skills. Skills are taught and retaught with continuing refinement and application to increasingly difficult materials. Whenever anything happens to interrupt this spiral process, whenever steps are missed, whenever children move from one level of sophistication to another without mastery, trouble is almost inevitable. Most of the difficulty students encounter and most of the problems teachers have in trying to teach reading arise from gaps in student mastery of the increments of skill as they are presented. It does not take long for small deficiencies to add up to large deficits.

Less obvious, perhaps, but just as important is the fact that growth in appreciation and interest in reading is also a continuing process in which students go through predictable stages. For example, most junior high school students are at the junior novel stage. But what is true for the majority of students is not true for all. A conspicuous example of the failure to recognize this fact often occurs in secondary schools in which many students seem to exhibit a dramatic decline in desire to read. This lack of interest has been attributed to many things: the generally turned-off-to-school attitude of youth, conditions in the homes, TV, the hurry and scurry of the daily life of the typical teenager. Perhaps all of these factors have some bearing on the situation, but the more likely reason is the fact that secondary teachers so often assume that because their students are in high school they are ready for sophisticated adult reading, when, in fact, many are not. It's a little like feeding a person lobster newburg before he has learned to like peanut butter. Something very destructive happens as a result of diverting or interrupting the sequential development of interest and appreciation.

Generally speaking, articulation, both vertical and horizontal, depends on several factors:

1) A common philosophy about the purposes and nature of reading instruction.

2) A master organizational plan within the school system. Without this, special programs, special personnel, and within-classroom projects provide only a conglomerate of bits and pieces. A reading coordinator becomes a fighter of brush fires unless he works within a compre-

hensive plan.

3) Reading personnel who can bridge the gaps; for example, vertically between the elementary school and the junior high school and horizontally between what English teachers are doing about reading instruction and what social studies teachers are doing. To accomplish this, a reading coordinator is an essential within every system; so, also, is a reading task force representing all levels and with responsibility to plan and recommend.

4) A detailed scope and sequence statement of the skill and attitude objectives of the reading continuum. This statement provides the vehicle for organizing both materials and instructional practices. Material, for example, is purchased only if it provides for the teaching of a segment of the scope and sequence and if it is compatible with other materials which also support this overall statement of goals. This scope and sequence document is the backbone of the entire effort. (See Section D for a further discussion of materials.)

5) A means of monitoring the progress of children through the instructional sequence so that mastery is assured.

6) A practical means of transferring information about the individual students' progress through the sequence to every person concerned with this progress.

7) A practical means of assuring that this information about individual students is constantly updated and used at each succeeding stage of the students' progress.

Horizontal articulation should be considered, also, at a deeper level. Reading is a language process which is closely linked with all the other language processes. Teachers should be teaching students to use language rather than, as is so often the case, to read, write, speak, and listen as if they were separate skills or groups of skills. Instruction in one of the language arts is beneficial to the student's ability to use other language arts if the commonality of the skills is recognized and made apparent to both student and teacher. Listening for main ideas will help students read for main ideas if they understand that the underlying thinking process is the same. Teachers should not have to be reminded that the base for all the uses of language is oral, written language is a secondary phenomenon. Yet educators have acted on this fundamental understanding only in a very limited way, mainly in the current emphasis on oral language development of preschool and kindergarten children as a prerequisite for reading instruction.

If educators can put reading back among the language arts where it belongs, they will have taken a very long step in the right direction. This horizontal articulation among the language arts themselves is to be encouraged for many reasons, not the least of which is time to teach

(e.g., teaching the spelling and reading of a word, using punctuation in writing and for reading comprehension). But much more is involved than using time more efficiently; instruction becomes more substantial and meaningful.

Articulation will not be complete until educators also recognize more fully the intimate relationships between the cognitive and the affective. So far, they have tended to think of them separately, for the most part failing to act upon the fact that how one feels about reading may be the most important factor in how one learns to read; and, in reverse, how well one reads may be the most important factor in how one feels about it. No one wants to risk failure. Teachers will find that if they do more to help students read skillfully they will have less trouble getting them to read with interest and enthusiasm.

Local decision making

Just as there are individual differences among children, there are individual differences among school districts, among schools within a district, and among teachers within a school. One school system has many minority group children; another does not. One school has plentiful media materials; another does not even have a central library. One teacher works happily in an open environment; another risks a nervous breakdown in such a situation. In spite of these obvious differences, attempts are continually being made to impose a single organizational structure and uniform procedures on a school's or a district's reading program. In many cases this occurs when a commercial program is purchased and mandated for common use on a district-wide or school-wide basis. It may or may not easily accommodate individual students' differences. Whether it can accommodate differences among schools and among the teachers who will implement it is a question which often is not even asked.

Classroom teachers are in the best position to make decisions about the most appropriate type of organizational pattern to use for reading instruction in their own classrooms. Groups of classroom teachers working with their principal and reading consultant are in the best position to make decisions for the school as a whole. So long as individual classroom and school programs are compatible with each other, there is no reason why every teacher and every school in a district must go the same route. Teachers work with students on a daily basis and can make judgments about the effectiveness of the instruction provided because they receive continuous feedback. Teachers are also the ones who are best able to judge what type of approach and structure they themselves are capable of implementing efficiently and effectively. There is little doubt that teachers will do their best work with a program in which they feel comfortable.

A few all-school or all-school-system decisions must be made by teachers representing the various schools and levels of instruction. Such decisions involve the overall goals and philosophy of the program, general time allotments for reading/language arts instruction, the scope and sequence of the skills to be taught. Such decisions must not be made by someone outside the school district. If this happens, it precludes input from the very people who are most knowledgeable about the situation and who will be responsible for the teaching.

Local decision making, however, by no means implies a laissez faire organization. Within a great deal of flexibility, there must be structure. The management systems which now accompany many reading programs are one way to provide the required structure and at the same time the necessary flexibility. By spelling out in detail the goals of the program, they make it possible to employ an eclectic approach incorporating many types of materials, grouping strategies, and instructional techniques. The teacher, not the program, prescribes the instruction for individual students. The goals become all-important, not the particular way in which individual students, individual teachers, or individual schools reach these goals.

Flexible organizational structure built around clearly defined goals makes it possible to capitalize on the most important resource a reading program has: the classroom teacher. If organizational patterns are determined locally, they will fit the circumstances and have maximum potential for success.

Evaluation

The ultimate criteria for judging a reading program are the students' ability to read and the extent to which they do read voluntarily. Some type of objective testing can provide a quantitative measure of students' acquisition of skills. Whether or not they read independently must usually be determined by observation and the interaction of teacher and students.

When attempting to assess mastery of skills, consideration must be given, first of all, to whether or not the type of measurement used is appropriate for the intended purpose. Criterion-referenced measurement should be used to determine the extent of individual mastery of skills. Norm-referenced measurement should be used if the purpose is to compare students' achievement with a supposedly typical normative group. The kinds of information to be gained from these two types of tests can both be helpful, but the purposes they serve are very different. Criterion-referenced tests are useful for diagnosis, student placement, and monitoring of individual student growth. Norm-referenced tests are useful for monitoring the success of the reading program itself over relatively long periods of time if local results are interpreted in relation

to other factors such as comparisons with the intellectual level and sociological background of the norming population.

The major difficulty inherent in criterion-referenced measurement is that skills mastery is measured in isolation. The tests usually do not test for mastery in meaningful context. In testing for knowledge of short vowels, for example, a student may be asked to pronounce five words containing short sounds of vowels. If the test has content validity, the student will usually be considered to have mastered this skill if he is able to pronounce at least four of the five words. Yet, when the student encounters *mat* in a reading selection, he may be unable to decode it. Given the fact that he has no difficulty with the consonants *m* and *t* in their respective positions, it would appear that he is not able to apply his knowledge of short vowels during the reading act. This is not an uncommon occurrence.

A second difficulty revolves around the concept of mastery. What is mastery? Probably the most concise way to answer this question is to explain what it is *not*. It is not a fixed level of performance that holds over time. When a student demonstrates mastery of a skill on a criterion-referenced test at a particular level, this fact signifies only that he has mastered it at that level and in isolation. It does not eliminate the need to reinforce the skill through application in a normal contextual situation. And it certainly does not eliminate the need to reintroduce the skill at a higher level of complexity. Although basically the same reading skills are used at all levels, the degree of sophistication required to demonstrate competence increases. Competence in critical reading at the sixth grade level would be quite inadequate at the ninth grade level.

Because of the rather basic level of sophistication of currently available measurement instruments of all types, care must be exercised in interpreting results. Teacher judgment should always be included in making decisions based on test data. This is especially true of the higher level comprehension skills. For instance, it is not easy to determine objectively whether or not a student applies critical reading skills appropriately when he should be doing so. If he fails to apply one or more of these skills when they are called for, it may be that he has not mastered them to the extent required. But it may also be that he has mastered them but chooses not to apply them for some reason, perhaps lack of motivation.

The fact that a student *can* read does not always mean that he *will* read. He must develop an appreciation for reading which in turn will stimulate him to read. Even if he has mastered all the necessary skills and is quite able to apply them, he cannot really be considered to be successful unless he has a desire to read.

How does one determine the effectiveness of motivation in the reading

program? Is it simply a matter of counting the number and type of selections a student reads? Should the selections be judged on the basis of their literary quality? Is it important to attempt to develop a student's taste for what is generally called "good literature"?

Unfortunately it is difficult, if not impossible, to measure objectively the effectiveness of this aspect of the reading program. Although a few objective measures of attitude and interest exist, their validity is in considerable doubt. Probably the best that can be done is to use capable and conscientious teacher observation.

Accountability

There has, for a very long time, been concern about the reasons for less-than-to-be-expected achievement in reading. Usually it has been implied, if not said, that if only teachers would become better teachers of reading, all would be well.

Granted that teachers play a very important role, perhaps the most important, but there are many other persons who are also accountable: the students themselves, their parents, their teachers, the guidance counselors, the media specialists, the administrators, the board of education, schools of education which train reading teachers, state departments of education, state and federal legislators, publishers. In this paper only major reasons for the responsibility of each of these groups can be suggested.

Students' responsibility is to cooperate with all those persons who are trying to help them. They must have some faith that their teachers and others know what they are doing and intend to be helpful. This attitude was prevelent in schools a generation ago; it must be restored. It is almost impossible to teach a student who does not want to learn and does not believe that he can be taught.

To deserve this cooperation and faith from their students, however, teachers must be better prepared to teach reading than the majority are today. They can acquire this preparation through their own efforts, as many of our best teachers have done, or they can be required to acquire it. Either way, they must have the skills and the attitudes which make superior teachers of reading. They must also be readers themselves, for students, in this age of disaffection and skepticism, believe what they see, not what they are told.

It may be true, furthermore, that what students see at home is as important, perhaps more important, than what they see at school. Parents and other adults in the home have little right to expect students to do what they themselves rarely do or to criticize the schools for failing to persuade students that ability to read is a necessity for the good life.

Except in those circumstances where parents have never had the opportunity themselves to learn to read, they are accountable for setting a model for their children.

The reading consultant, whose primary responsibility is to work with teachers, is usually well acquainted with theory, procedures, and materials for teaching reading, but often has not learned techniques for managing change among other adults. Consultants must expect to live up to their title: their role is to consult with other adults to persuade them to improve their work. They must know how to conduct group meetings, how to get the kind of commitment from their superiors which they need to do their work, how to deal with confrontation when it occurs as it almost always does when real change is involved, how to resolve issues by consensus, how to help people express their concerns openly, how to achieve commitment to the goals of the program.

Administrators are key people in organizing and managing any reading program. They are the persons who can assign top priority to reading instruction in the schools they control. They can organize the whole school so that reading instruction can take place effectively, they can schedule time for the reading consultant to work efficiently with the teachers, they can approve policies with regard to such matters as book selection, promotion of students, use of paraprofessionals. In fact, not much of significance will happen to reading instruction in a school without the active support of the administration.

Guidance counselors must realize the significance of the inability to read as the major cause of most academic failure and most school dropouts. And having realized this, they must help teachers and administrators with the tasks of early detection of problems, of optimum placement of students to receive help, and of monitoring the effectiveness of help received.

Media specialists organize and present the materials with which students practice and extend their reading skills and interests. They also share with teachers the responsibility for seeing that students learn some of the skills, particularly those locational skills needed for efficient use of the resources of a media center. But more than this, they share the responsibility for making enthusiastic readers of the students who use their facilities. One of their greatest responsibilities is to know both students' interests and their independent reading levels. Why is it so often true that students do not go to the school library to find materials to read for pleasure? Probably because they have learned that books written at their independent level are in short supply in many of these facilities.

The board of education is, of course, the ultimate source of local school policy. If members of the board really understood the fundamental role the ability to read plays in almost every aspect of instruction, they

would assume the responsibility for providing enough consultants to serve the faculty effectively. They would establish an employment policy which would give preference to applicants for teaching positions at every level whose training in reading instruction is superior. They would support all types of staff development efforts in reading and insist upon it as a requirement for continued employment. In this era of teacher surplus, the results would be dramatic.

Teacher preparation institutions, also, have major responsibility in this matter. They must become more involved with the reality of the situation, more concerned that their students receive a large part of their training in situations where they can observe and actually work with students. They must provide much more instruction for secondary teachers than they are presently doing and, also for reading consultants whose responsibility as agents of change in a school reading program is now almost completely ignored in their college training.

Colleges and universities will make these changes, however, only in response to demand. The problem is circular. So long as little or no reading education is required for certification and/or employment of teachers, particularly secondary teachers, colleges will not develop programs. The ball has to stop somewhere, and the logical place for it to stop is in the state departments of education, where the authority exists to make reading education in some depth mandatory for all teachers. Furthermore, given the fact that techniques of reading instruction are changing rapidly, meeting such a requirement should not remain effective for longer than five years, during which time every teacher should be required to carry on some kind of activity to update his knowledge.

State departments of education, however, function within certain federal and state guidelines and statutes which often determine allocation of funds, place restraints upon spending, and involve numerous legal requirements. Federal and state legislators are so remote from the realities of the education process that their decisions, often far-reaching in their effect, can be ill-advised or worse. Yet their influence is so great that they cannot escape accountability. They certainly can do no less than to seek and use the advice of the best reading specialists available to them.

The last group which has to share responsibility for reading instruction is the publishers. Many good materials exist for the direct teaching of reading skills. However, there is very little to help teachers show students how to transfer their skills to content area materials. This kind of help could easily be supplied by publishers in manuals to accompany their content textbooks. It probably would be made available if publishers were convinced of a demand. As it is, teachers "tell" students to read material in the content fields; they do not "teach" them to read

these materials. The problem most publishers see at present, if they see any problem, is that perhaps their books in the content fields are too hard. A few of them are; most are right on target. The publishers' move must be not to make their books easier, but to make it easier for teachers to help students to use their books.

Accountability for successful reading instruction must, then, be laid at the door of many individuals and groups, both inside and outside the schools themselves. The myth that the teacher is the key to improved instruction must be laid to rest. The teacher holds one of the keys, but only if he is supported by many other individuals and groups can he accomplish the task. Accountability is a shared responsibility.

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